

# Activation of a Recombinant Human Factor VII Structural Analogue Alters Its Affinity of Binding to Tissue Factor

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A competitive enzyme-linked immunoadsorbent assay (ELISA) technique has been developed to facilitate quantitative analysis of the earliest step in the initiation of the extrinsic pathway of coagulation, i.e., complex formation of factor VII/VIIa with tissue factor. The ELISA measures the binding of biotinylated human plasma factor VII to relipidated recombinant human tissue factor. Quantitation of the relative affinity (expressed as  $IC_{50}$ ) of any factor VII molecular population or structural analogue for tissue factor can be determined by competitive binding. Subnanomolar concentrations of both wild-type recombinant human factor VII (rFVII) and rFVII(R152Q), a mutation at the FVII activation site, competed effectively with biotinylated plasma-derived factor VII in binding to tissue factor. In contrast, the affinity of rFVII(R79Q), a mutation in the first epidermal growth factor-like domain, was 12-fold lower. Following activation of rFVII(R79Q), its affinity for tissue factor and enzymatic activity increased 4-fold and 6-fold, respectively. For wild-type rFVII, enzymatic activity rose significantly following activation. However, its affinity for tissue factor was unchanged. We conclude that both the activation state of factor VII and the mutation of amino-acid residues within the first epidermal growth factor-like domain may alter the affinity of factor VII for tissue factor. © 1996 Wiley-Liss, Inc.

**Key words:** factor VII, tissue factor, epidermal growth factor domain

## INTRODUCTION

Coagulation factor VII (FVII) is a 50-kDa, multidomain, vitamin K-dependent glycoprotein that is synthesized in the liver and secreted into the bloodstream as an inactive zymogen precursor of the serine protease factor VIIa (FVIIa). After binding to its specific cell-surface receptor tissue factor in the presence of calcium, single-chain zymogen FVII is converted to two-chain enzymatically-active FVIIa by cleavage of the Arg<sub>152</sub>-Ile<sub>153</sub> peptide bond. The FVIIa-tissue factor complex can then rapidly activate its principal substrates, factor IX and factor X, by limited proteolysis, leading to thrombin formation and ultimately a fibrin clot [1–4].

We have previously shown that a monoclonal antibody specific for the first epidermal growth factor-like (EGF-1) domain of human FVII blocked both the binding of FVII to tissue factor and its activation to FVIIa, suggesting that the EGF-1 domain of FVII may be essential

for complex formation with tissue factor [5]. Recently, we confirmed the above finding by demonstrating that a naturally-occurring R79Q mutation within the EGF-1 domain of FVII markedly decreased FVII binding to human tissue factor [6,7]. As an extension of this work, plasma-derived human FVII (pdFVII) was biotinylated and utilized in a competitive enzyme-linked immunoadsorbent assay (ELISA) to quantitate the competition between structural mutants of recombinant FVII and biotinylated pdFVII in binding to tissue factor. Recombinant, wild-type human FVII and two FVII structural analogues, R79Q and R152Q, were employed in the present study. This competitive

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ELISA allows rapid analysis of the relative affinity of nanogram quantities of either purified or unpurified FVII molecular populations for tissue factor. A preliminary report of this work has been published in abstract form [8].

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Materials

Purified pdFVII was purchased from Enzyme Research Laboratories, Inc. (South Bend, IN). Recombinant tissue factor (TF) apoprotein, expressed in *Escherichia coli* and purified to homogeneity, was a generous gift of Dr. R. Kelley (Genentech, Inc., South San Francisco, CA). Recombinant FVII proteins - wild-type, (R79Q) and (R152Q) were permanently expressed in the human kidney cell line 293 using the expression vector pCMV5 and purified to homogeneity using adsorption on Q-Sepharose followed by affinity chromatography on a calcium-dependent anti-FVII monoclonal antibody sepharose column, as previously described [7]. Affinity-purified goat anti-rabbit IgG (heavy and light chain) and alkaline phosphatase-conjugated streptavidin were purchased from Jackson Immuno Research Laboratories (BioCan Scientific, Mississauga, Ontario, Canada). Monospecific polyclonal rabbit anti-human FVII sera were obtained from Diagnostica Stago (Wellmark Diagnostics, Guelph, Ontario, Canada). Monoclonal antibody 231-7 to human FVII was produced and purified in our laboratory [9]. Factor X was purified from normal pooled human plasma as previously described [10]. Factor Xa was prepared by Russells viper venom activation of factor X and purified by DEAE-Sephadex A50 chromatography [11]. Bovine serum albumin, fraction V, was from Gibco Laboratories (Gibco Canada, Inc., Burlington, Ontario, Canada). Normal pooled human plasma was prepared by pooling citrated plasma from 20 healthy donors, and was stored in aliquots at  $-70^{\circ}\text{C}$ . Tween-20 was from Pierce Chemical Company (Chromatographic Specialties Inc., Brockville, Ontario, Canada). N-hydroxysuccinimidobiotin (NHS-Biotin) was obtained as a 75-mM stock solution in dimethylsulfoxide from Bio-Rad Laboratories (Mississauga, Ontario, Canada). Benzamidine HCl and dansyl-Glu-Gly-Arg chloromethyl ketone (dansyl-Glu-Gly-Arg-CH<sub>2</sub>Cl) were obtained from Calbiochem (San Diego, CA). L- $\alpha$ -phosphatidylcholine, type VE (egg yolk), L- $\alpha$ -phosphatidyl-L-serine (bovine brain), poly-L-lysine HBr (Molecular weight 100,000), n-octyl- $\beta$ -D-glycopyranoside, disodium-p-nitrophenyl phosphate (PNPP), nitro blue tetrazolium (NBT), and bromochloroindolyl phosphate (BCIP) were purchased from Sigma Chemical Company (St. Louis, MO). Platelín (rabbit brain phospholipids) was obtained from Organon Teknika (Scarborough, Ontario, Canada). S-2222(N-benzoyl-L-isoleucyl-L-glutamyl-glycyl-L-arginine-p-nitroanilide), a chromogenic

peptide substrate for factor Xa, was obtained from Kabi Diagnostica (Helena Laboratories, Mississauga, Ontario, Canada). ELISA assays were performed in flat-bottomed 96-well Immulon II microtiter plates (Fisher Scientific, Toronto, Ontario, Canada).

### Factor VII Antigen Concentration

FVII antigen concentration was determined by ELISA using the factor VII-specific monoclonal antibody 231-7 [9] as the trapping antibody, monospecific polyclonal rabbit anti-human FVII sera as primary antibody, and alkaline phosphatase-conjugated goat anti-rabbit IgG as secondary antibody [12]. Normal pooled plasma was used as a standard and assumed to have a FVII antigen concentration of 450 ng/ml [13].

### Clotting and Amidolytic Activity Measurements

Clotting activity of the various FVII samples was measured by prothrombin time (PT) assay using the Fibrintimer CoaSYSTEM analyzer (Labor GmbH, Hamburg, Germany) as previously described [6]. Briefly, FVII test samples and normal pooled plasma were diluted in 0.05 M imidazole-HCl, pH 7.4, containing 0.1 M NaCl and 3.5 mg/ml bovine serum albumin (imidazole buffer). A 100- $\mu\text{l}$  volume of diluted test sample or normal pooled plasma was gently mixed with 100  $\mu\text{l}$  of FVII-depleted plasma and incubated at  $37^{\circ}\text{C}$ . Twenty ng of relipidated recombinant TF [6] in 200  $\mu\text{l}$  of 0.15 M NaCl supplemented with 3.5 mg/ml bovine serum albumin, and 32.5 mM CaCl<sub>2</sub>, were added to initiate coagulation, and the PT was noted. A standard log-log plot of PT vs. clotting activity was constructed using various dilutions of normal pooled plasma, and the clotting activity of test samples was determined by reference to this graph. FVII in normal pooled plasma has a specific clotting activity of 2,200 U/mg FVII antigen [13]. FVII activation was also measured by amidolytic assay using S-2222 chromogenic substrate [14].

### Biotinylation of Human Plasma Factor VII

Human pdFVII was biotinylated as described by Savage et al. [15]. Briefly, the pdFVII was dialyzed against 0.05 M carbonate-bicarbonate buffer, pH 8.5 ( $4 \times 250$  ml), overnight at  $4^{\circ}\text{C}$ . A working stock solution (1.24 mM) of NHS-biotin was prepared in dimethylsulfoxide. To 120  $\mu\text{l}$  of a sample containing 15  $\mu\text{g}$  pdFVII, 4.8 nmol of NHS-biotin were added, mixed gently, and incubated in an ice bath for 2 hr. The molar ratio of NHS-biotin to FVII was thus 16:1. After 2 hr, 10  $\mu\text{l}$  of 1 M Tris-HCl, pH 8.0, were added to the reaction mixture to inactivate any excess NHS-biotin, followed by further incubation for 15 min in an ice bath. Then 10  $\mu\text{l}$  of bovine serum albumin (50 mg/ml in H<sub>2</sub>O) were added as a carrier protein, and the sample was dialyzed against 0.05 M Tris-buffered saline, pH 7.5, overnight at  $4^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $4 \times 250$  ml).

After dialysis, biotinylated pdFVII was divided into 20- $\mu$ l aliquots and stored at  $-70^{\circ}\text{C}$ .

### Competitive ELISA of Biotinylated pdFVII Binding to Immobilized Recombinant Tissue Factor

Recombinant tissue-factor apoprotein was relipidated into phosphatidylcholine and phosphatidylserine lipid vesicles (60:40 by weight) as described elsewhere [6]. Relipidated recombinant TF (11.5 ng) was coated onto flat-bottom Immulon II microtiter plates in 100  $\mu$ l of carbonate antigen coating buffer overnight at  $4^{\circ}\text{C}$ . Pure phospholipid vesicle-coated wells (without TF) were used as controls. After washing the plates three times in 0.15 M NaCl, nonspecific binding sites on the plates were blocked with 3.5-mg/ml bovine serum albumin in TBS-T buffer (10 mM Tris, pH 8.0, 0.15 M NaCl, 0.025% Tween-20, 10 mM  $\text{CaCl}_2$ ) for 2 hr at room temperature. After washing three times in TBS-T, 100  $\mu$ l of biotinylated pdFVII in TBS-T + bovine serum albumin buffer were added in triplicate to recombinant TF-coated wells and incubated for 2 hr at room temperature. To generate a standard curve, biotinylated pdFVII in the concentration range of 1–16 ng/ml was added in the absence of any inhibitors. For competitive ELISA, a fixed amount of biotinylated pdFVII (5 ng/ml final concentration) was gently mixed with varying concentrations of the inhibitors, i.e., wild-type rFVII, rFVII (R152Q), and rFVII (R79Q), and added to the wells. The molar ratio of inhibitors to biotinylated pdFVII varied from 0.5:1–10:1. After washing four times in TBS-T buffer, biotinylated pdFVII bound to TF was detected by adding 100  $\mu$ l of 0.75- $\mu$ g/ml streptavidin conjugated to alkaline phosphatase in TBS-T buffer + bovine serum albumin, followed by incubation for 1 hr at room temperature. After washing four times, 100  $\mu$ l of the chromogenic substrate p-nitrophenylphosphate in diethanolamine buffer (1 mg/ml) were added, followed by incubation for 1 hr at room temperature. Color development was stopped after 1 hr by adding 25  $\mu$ l of 1 M NaOH, and sample absorbance was read at 405 nm in a microplate autoreader (Model EL309, BioTek Instruments, Burlington, VT). After subtraction of background nonspecific binding (routinely  $<0.1$  OD units), semilogarithmic plots of percent biotinylated pdFVII bound vs. log of the inhibitor concentration was fitted via linear regression analysis, and the  $\text{IC}_{50}$  (inhibitor concentration needed to achieve 50% reduction of binding of biotinylated pdFVII to TF) value for each rFVII structural analogue was derived from the respective graph [16]. The decrease in biotinylated pdFVII binding to TF was thus a function of both the affinity and molar concentration of the rFVII inhibitor.

### Activation of rFVII Molecules

Both wild-type rFVII and rFVII(R79Q) were activated to FVIIa in the absence of tissue factor, using purified

factor Xa. The presence of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ , phospholipids (plattelin), and a positively-charged surface such as poly-L-lysine [17] was required for maximum cleavage of FVII. Activation was carried out in 10 mM Tris-buffered saline, pH 8.0, containing final concentrations of 5 mM  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ , 3.5 mg/ml bovine serum albumin, and 0.025% Tween-20. Briefly, 5  $\mu$ l of rFVII (25  $\mu$ g/ml) were gently mixed in a microfuge tube with 5  $\mu$ l of phospholipids, 5  $\mu$ l of purified factor Xa (0.5  $\mu$ g/ml), and 2  $\mu$ l of poly-L-lysine (5  $\mu$ g/ml), and the final reaction volume was adjusted to 20  $\mu$ l with buffer. The samples were incubated at  $37^{\circ}\text{C}$  for 90 min. The weight ratio of enzyme to FVII in the reaction was thus 1:50, and that of poly-L-lysine to FVII was 1:12.5. Control reactions containing only rFVII plus buffer, or rFVII, buffer, and phospholipids, were performed simultaneously. Following activation, the reaction was stopped by adding 10  $\mu$ l of an inhibitor containing 75 mM benzamidine and 0.3 mM dansyl-glu-gly-arg  $\text{CH}_2\text{Cl}$  in  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$ , for both ELISA binding assays and  $\text{IC}_{50}$  determination. For clotting-activity measurements, the reaction was stopped by diluting the samples in calcium-free imidazole buffer and storing on ice. Residual factor Xa activity in the test samples did not have any significant effect on the PT assay. The completeness of factor Xa digestion of rFVII molecules was determined using reducing sodium dodecyl sulfate polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis (SDS-PAGE) and Western blot analysis [18].

## RESULTS

### Functional Activity of Biotinylated pdFVII

In the present work we initially determined if biotinylation, rather than iodination, might serve as a useful labelling procedure for the quantitative analysis of the binding characteristics of purified pdFVII to solid-phase recombinant TF. Biotinylated pdFVII was therefore analyzed by SDS-PAGE, S-2222 amidolytic assay, PT assay, and binding to recombinant TF-coated microtiter wells. Relative to native pdFVII, biotinylated pdFVII had mean amidolytic and clotting activities of 88% and 61%, respectively. Biotinylated pdFVII was chemically intact, as indicated by its migration as a single 50-kDa band on SDS-PAGE analysis (data not shown). Figure 1 shows the time course for binding to solid-phase recombinant TF of equivalent concentrations (10 ng/ml or 0.1 nM) of native and biotinylated pdFVII. FVII binding was quantitated by ELISA, using rabbit anti-human factor VII as primary antibody and alkaline phosphatase-conjugated goat anti-rabbit IgG as secondary antibody. After 2 hr of incubation at room temperature, the relative binding of biotinylated pdFVII to solid-phase recombinant TF compared favorably to native pdFVII (Fig. 1). Further experiments indicated that the binding of biotinylated pdFVII to recombinant TF-coated microtiter wells, as detected by chromogenic assay using

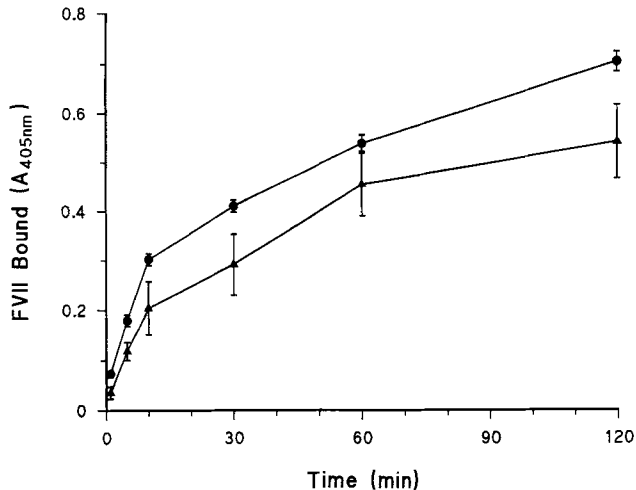


Fig. 1. Time course of binding of native (●) and biotinylated (▲) pd FVII at 10 ng/ml concentration (0.2 nM) to immobilized recombinant tissue factor, as measured by ELISA. Data are means  $\pm$  SEM.

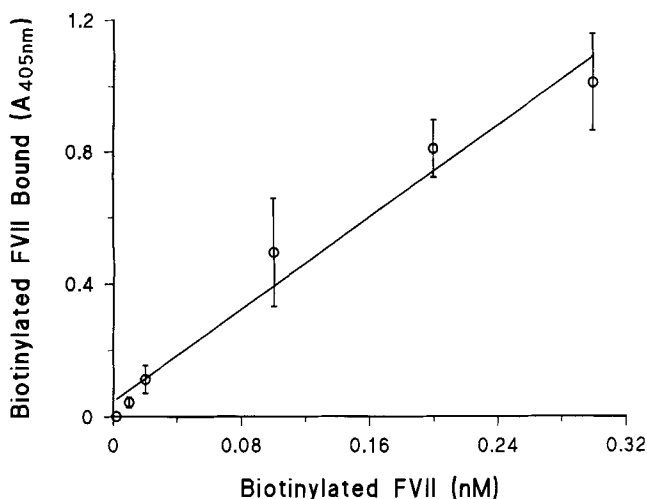


Fig. 2. Dose-response of binding of biotinylated pdFVII to immobilized recombinant tissue factor, as measured by ELISA. Data are means  $\pm$  SEM.

streptavidin-alkaline phosphatase and PNPP, was saturable at 0.4 nM biotinylated pdFVII (data not shown) and linear ( $r = 0.98$ ) in the concentration range 0.02–0.32 nM (Fig. 2). We concluded that biotinylation of purified pdFVII was an efficient approach to the evaluation of FVII binding to solid-phase recombinant TF.

#### Competitive Inhibition of Biotinylated pdFVII Binding to Recombinant TF: Effect of Unactivated rFVII Analogues

We recently described a patient with homozygous mutations in both the EGF-1 domain, R79Q, and the factor Xa cleavage site, R152Q, of FVII [7]. In the process of

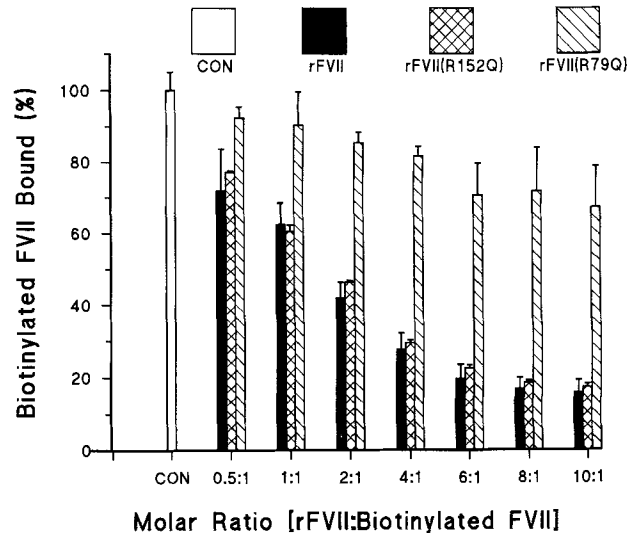


Fig. 3. Competitive inhibition of binding of biotinylated pdFVII to immobilized recombinant tissue factor by rFVII structural analogues. Con, control value (100%) in absence of inhibitor. rFVII, rFVII(R152Q), and rFVII(R79Q) represent various recombinant FVII molecules, as described in the text. Data are means  $\pm$  SEM.

TABLE I. Effect of Proteolytic Activation of rFVII Analogues on Binding to Tissue Factor

Sample	IC <sub>50</sub> (nM) <sup>a</sup>	
	rFVII (not activated)	rFVII activated by factor Xa
rFVII	0.16 $\pm$ 0.08	0.15 $\pm$ 0.04
rFVII(R79Q)	1.94 $\pm$ 0.54	0.56 $\pm$ 0.10
rFVII(R152Q)	0.15 $\pm$ 0.04	

<sup>a</sup>IC<sub>50</sub> were measured by competitive inhibition of biotinylated pdFVII binding to recombinant TF. Data are means  $\pm$  SEM.

analyzing the effects of the two mutations on the function of FVII, the recombinant proteins wild-type rFVII, rFVII(R152Q), and rFVII(R79Q) were separately expressed and purified to homogeneity from human 293 cells [7]. Since the binding of biotinylated pdFVII to solid-phase recombinant TF was linearly related to FVII concentration, we utilized this assay system to quantitatively assess the competitive binding characteristics of rFVII analogues as IC<sub>50</sub> values. When a fixed concentration of biotinylated pdFVII (0.1 nM, i.e., 5 ng/ml) was incubated with increasing molar concentrations of competing rFVII, both unactivated rFVII wild-type and rFVII(R152Q) were equally effective as competitive inhibitors. At a 1.5-fold molar excess of these inhibitors, the binding of biotinylated pdFVII was decreased by 50% (Fig. 3 and Table I). In contrast, unactivated rFVII(R79Q) was a very weak competitive inhibitor, exhibiting an affinity more than an order of magnitude lower than that of unactivated wild-type rFVII (Fig. 3 and Table I).

TABLE II. Effect of Proteolytic Activation of rFVII Analogues on Clotting Activity

Treatment	Clotting activity (units/mg protein) <sup>a</sup>	
	rFVII	rFVII(R79Q)
Buffer only	1,700 ± 260	440 ± 60
Buffer + phospholipid	1,720 ± 120	500 ± 20
Buffer + phospholipid + factor Xa	4,540 ± 760	3,080 ± 420

<sup>a</sup>Clotting activities shown represent mean ± SEM with reference to normal pooled plasma. The rFVII(R152Q) analogue had no clotting activity (data not shown). After activation, both unactivated and activated samples were diluted to a FVII antigen concentration of 500 ng/ml, and clotting activities were determined.

### Competitive Inhibition of Biotinylated pdFVII Binding to Recombinant TF: Effect of Proteolytic Activation of rFVII Analogues

Both wild type rFVII and rFVII(R79Q) were activated to rFVIIa (in the absence of tissue factor) with purified factor Xa protease in the presence of poly-L-lysine, phospholipids, and Ca<sup>2+</sup> [17]. Analysis of the rFVII molecules before and after enzyme digestion was performed by reducing SDS-PAGE and Western blots using polyclonal rabbit anti-human FVII-specific antisera [7]. The cleavage of both wild-type rFVII and rFVII(R79Q) to rFVIIa was essentially complete (data not shown). The IC<sub>50</sub> for both unactivated and activated rFVII molecules was determined. As shown in Table I, the IC<sub>50</sub> for activated rFVII(R79Q) decreased approximately 4-fold from 1.94 nM to 0.56 nM, whereas the IC<sub>50</sub> for unactivated wild-type rFVII, wild-type rFVIIa, and rFVII(R152Q) were essentially identical at 0.16 nM, 0.15 nM, and 0.15 nM, respectively. Thus, the proteolytic activation of wild-type rFVII had little effect on its affinity for immobilized recombinant TF, whereas activation of the rFVII(R79Q) analogue markedly increased its affinity for solid-phase recombinant TF.

### Clotting Activity of rFVII Analogues

To confirm the functional relevance of the observed IC<sub>50</sub> values, the clotting activities of unactivated and activated rFVII molecules were measured using the PT assay (Table II). At physiological concentrations, unactivated rFVII(R79Q) had only 25% of the clotting activity of wild-type rFVII, a result consistent with its poor affinity for TF. After activation by factor Xa, rFVII(R79Q) increased in absolute clotting activity by 6-fold (Table II) and had 68% of the clotting activity of activated wild-type rFVII.

### DISCUSSION

An ELISA for quantitation of the binding of biotinylated pdFVII to relipidated immobilized recombinant TF has been described. Direct competition between structural mutants of rFVII and biotinylated pdFVII in binding to immobilized recombinant TF could thus be demonstrated

and expressed as the relative affinity constant, IC<sub>50</sub>. Although radioiodination has been widely used for labelling coagulation FVII [19–23], the advantage of biotinylation lies in its simplicity and safety, and in the chemical stability of biotinylated proteins. The biotinylation of pdFVII did not adversely affect either its enzymatic activity or its ability to bind to immobilized recombinant TF. The time course of binding of biotinylated pdFVII to immobilized recombinant TF was similar to that of native pdFVII. Based on these data, we concluded that the biotinylation of pdFVII was a satisfactory labelling procedure, enabling us to pursue further quantitative analyses of the interaction of FVII and TF.

In competitive ELISA experiments, unactivated wild-type rFVII and rFVII(R152Q) effectively competed with biotinylated pdFVII for binding to immobilized recombinant TF. In contrast, the IC<sub>50</sub> for unactivated rFVII(R79Q) was more than an order of magnitude lower than those observed for the other rFVII-TF interactions (Table I). This data is supported by recent TF binding measurements, which described a 7.5-fold lower affinity for unactivated rFVII(R79Q) as compared to unactivated wild-type rFVII [24]. The clotting activity of unactivated rFVII(R79Q), as measured by PT assay (Table II), was about 25% of that of wild-type rFVII. In agreement with the latter data, Takamiya et al. [25] have described 2 additional patients with mutations at amino-acid residue 79 in the EGF-1 domain of FVII. In the first case, the subject had a homozygous R79Q substitution, while in the second case, the subject was found to be heterozygous for an R79W substitution. Both of these FVII variants of arginine-79 were found to exhibit markedly reduced FVII clotting activity [25]. Thus, the competitive ELISA binding experiments described herein, clotting ability measurements in three distinct kindreds [7,25], and recent molecular modelling studies of the FVIIa-TF complex [26] are all consistent with the interpretation that mutations at the arginine-79 position of FVII result in impaired interaction with TF.

An interesting and novel observation was the finding that the activation of rFVII(R79Q) to rFVIIa(R79Q) resulted in enhanced binding to recombinant TF and increased clotting activity relative to unactivated

rFVII(R79Q) (Table II). The marked increase in functional activities of rFVIIa(R79Q) may explain the tissue factor-dependent activity of rFVII(R79Q) observed by Kazama et al. [27]. In contrast, the activation of wild-type rFVII to rFVIIa did not significantly affect its affinity for recombinant TF but, as expected, was associated with an increase in observed clotting activity. These data support the important concept that FVII activation causes a conformational change in the molecule [28], allowing expression of neotissue-factor-binding epitope(s) in the heavy chain of FVIIa [29–31].

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